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KARACHI: Rather than just stocking novelty items and trinkets, fixed-price shops now offer a wide variety of household goods.—Dawn

# From 'dollar stores' to 'discount shops'

While weekly bazaars provide a wide variety of items, 'fixed-price' shops seem to be capturing customers who would otherwise flock to the 'landa' or thrift market

By Imran Gabol in Lahore and Muazam Ali Tahir in Karachi

FOOTPRINTS

WHILE the government's recent Household Integrated Economic Survey revealed an overall decline in household consumption patterns, the fact that the cost of living is rising exponentially hardly comes as news to ordinary citizens.

Faced with the prospect of daily-use items, groceries and other essentials becoming more and more expensive, it seems that one of the ways city-dwellers are coping with inflation is by changing where they shop.

Once considered a novelty, the 'dollar' or 'discount' store can be considered Pakistan's version of 'fixed-price' shops (such as the Poundland chain in the UK). Although the concept petered out during Covid, they are seeing a resurgence in popularity, with customers buying more than just trinkets and toys.

In fact, when *Dawn* visited a number of such stores across Lahore and Karachi, it emerged that people are primarily stacking their baskets with daily-use and household items from these stores.

Their purchases can include accessories, crockery, cosmetics, handbags, jewellery items, kitchen utensils, toys, cleaning supplies, stationery, or even socks.

During visits to the Saddar, Kharadar, Garden, and Bahadurabad in Karachi, and Anarkali, Gulshan-i-Ravi, Fortress Stadium, and Icchra in Lahore, *Dawn* saw people from all walks of life shopping at these outlets.

These 'sale shops' have a strategic advantage: a fixed price for all items ranging between Rs100 and Rs280, with only a few integrating a minor selection of costlier items. But with the dollar hovering around the Rs280 mark – still quite steep for the average city-dweller – most stores have had to settle for a more affordable price tag, which is lower than the actual rate of the greenback on the open market.

A woman working the storefront at a Rs190 store in Lahore's Old Anarkali Bazaar, gave the example of a well-known shampoo brand that usually retails for Rs1,500. But at her store, she said, the same product could be obtained for Rs190. While it wasn't clear whether the product she was selling was 'genuine' or a knock-off, for many shoppers, the distinction mattered little.

At a dollar store in Karachi's Saddar area, which is selling all items for Rs280 — not too far from the actual value of the dollar — a woman shopper told *Dawn* she was there to buy "quality essentials at a reasonable price". Looking to purchase a set of teacups, she said that she wasn't happy with the price point of traditional utensil vendors and found this option more suited to her needs.

Comparing the fixed-price shop to weekly bazaars that pop up over the weekends, she said that rather than being open on specific days, the fact that these stores are open all week round adds to the convenience factor. But a visit to the Clifton Sunday Bazaar revealed that the vendors there were making hay by stocking a wider variety of clothing and household essentials.

'Sale' shops, by contrast, seem to be capturing the customers that would previously flock to the '*landa*', or second-hand market.

**De-dollarisation of discount stores**

Shopkeepers in Old Anarkali told *Dawn* that the outlets were previously branded as 'one dollar shops', and that the signage had recently been changed to 'sale shops', while the pricing model remained unchanged.

Stores that haven't localised their business model have struggled to compete. This was evident from *Dawn*'s survey of 'dollar stores' mapped in key parts of Karachi, including DHA and Clifton, which had long since gone out of business.

The owner of one such erstwhile store, who *Dawn* reached out to through the contact listed on Google Maps, said they had closed when $1 was being exchanged for about Rs180.

According to him, even with prices capped at Rs170, demand was not as strong, and the business wasn't able to keep pace with the rising prices of goods either.

At the same time, a shopkeeper in Kharadar, who *Dawn* spoke to, says that they have now opened two more branches for their iteration of a Rs200 discount store, where prices range from Rs40 to Rs200.

Nadeemul Haque, former vice chancellor at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, told *Dawn* that this trend of 'localised' dollar shops, shows how market forces work.

He said that the concept was born out of excess local supply, which is linked to the "global industrial overload" catering to those whose purchasing power has been reduced in recent years.

# World markets face fresh jolt after US tariff threat over Greenland

• Macron wants 'never-before-used anti-coercion instrument' against US • Meloni calls tariff threat a 'mistake' • Dutch FM dubs it 'blackmail' • UK, Norway mull over response

LONDON: Global markets face a fresh bout of volatility after President Donald Trump vowed to slap tariffs on eight European nations until the US is allowed to buy Greenland.

Trump said he would impose an additional 10pc import tariffs from Feb 1 on goods from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Britain, which will rise to 25pc on June 1 if no deal is reached.

"Hopes that the tariff situation has calmed down for this year have been dashed for now — and we find ourselves in the same situation as last spring," Berenberg chief economist Holger Schmieding said, expecting the euro could come under pressure when Asian trade begins.

"The US-EU trade war is back," said Tina Fordham, strategist and Fordham Global Foresight founder.

On Sunday, European leaders slammed the tariff threat over their opposition to his designs on Greenland, warning transatlantic ties were at risk. "Tariff threats undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral," Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden warned in a joint statement.

An extraordinary meeting of its ambassadors was called in Brussels on Sunday by the EU, which clinched a deal with Washington in July for most EU exports to face a 15pc US levy.

France's President Emmanuel Macron will ask the EU to activate a never-before-used "anti-coercion instrument" against the US if Trump makes good on his tariff threat, Macron's aides said.

Even Trump's European allies baulked at the threat.

Italy's far-right Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, called the threatened tariffs a 'mistake'. "I believe that imposing new sanctions today would be a mistake," she said during her Seoul trip.

Dutch Foreign Minister David van Weel called Trump's threat an "inexplicable" form of "blackmail".

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was planning to discuss the situation with Trump "at the earliest opportunity", UK culture minister Lisa Nandy told the *BBC*, calling the president's tariff threat "wrong".

"We believe it's deeply unhelpful, and we believe it's counterproductive, and the prime minister has not shied away from making that clear," she said.

**Trade war fear**

France's Agricultural Minister Annie Genevard warned that tariffs would hurt Washington, too.

"In this escalation of tariffs, (Trump) has a lot to lose as well, as do his own farmers and industrialists," she told broadcasters *Europe 1* and *CNews*.

Norway, targeted by the tariff threat but, like Britain, not an EU member, said it was not currently looking at retaliation against US goods.

"I think one needs to stop and think so that a trade war can be averted that would lead to a downward spiral. Nobody would win," Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store told *NRK* television.—Agencies

GERMAN military personnel board the Icelandair flight leaving Nuuk airport in Greenland on Sunday.—AFP

# Fighting ends after Syrian, Kurdish forces agree on ceasefire

• SDF forces to withdraw east of Euphrates; Damascus to take over Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates • Deal stipulates SDF leaders to fill senior civil, military roles

DAMASCUS: The Syrian president and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced an immediate ceasefire after fierce fighting, which saw the government forces take control of territories held by the Kurdish SDF.

The Syrian army, in its lightning advance towards the key city of Raqqa in the north, captured Tabqa before reaching a ceasefire with the Kurdish forces on Sunday on all fronts. Al Jazeera, quoting the Syrian state media, said that the SDF forces agreed to withdraw to the east of the Euphrates under the agreement.

According to *Al Jazeera*, the agreement provides for the immediate and complete administrative and military handover of Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates to Damascus. The agreement also allowed the government to assume control of all civilian institutions in the two governorates, and current employees would be reinstated through decrees. The government promised it would not target the SDP supporters or fighters. The ceasefire granted the Syrian government control over all border crossings as well as oil and gas fields in the region. In addition, all civil institutions in al-Hasakah Governorate are to be integrated into official Syrian state institutions and administrative structures, while a presidential decree will be issued naming a candidate as governor.

The agreement also stipulated that a list of proposed leaders submitted by the SDP command will be used to fill senior military, security, and civilian posts in the central government, while heavy military forces from the city of Ain al-Arab/Kobani will withdraw. Furthermore, it also envisaged a local police force affiliated with the Syrian interior ministry besides the creation of a security force drawn from local residents.

The agreement also allowed the integration of the administration in charge of the Islamic State camps into the Syrian state structure.

**Syrian army advances**

Earlier in the day, *Reuters* reported that the Syrian government troops were entering the outskirts of Raqqa and were advancing deeper into the northeast of the country, the last stronghold of the US-backed autonomous Kurdish-led administration. Two Syrian military sources said that tanks had begun entering Raqqa, once controlled by the Islamic State, which the SDF captured in October 2017.

Thousands of residents took to the streets of Raqqa to celebrate the Syrian army's advances as SDF forces pulled out their equipment, two residents said.

The army, with its Arab tribal allies, had earlier taken control of Deir al-Zor's main oil and gas fields east of the Euphrates River — a key source of revenue for the Kurdish-led forces — dealing a major blow to the group.—Agencies

# Four terrorists killed on Afghan border, says Tajikistan

DUSHANBE: Tajikistan officials on Sunday said they "neutralised" four "terrorists" who crossed over from neighbouring Afghanistan in an area where deadly incidents have been on the rise in recent weeks, state media reported.

Tajikistan, in Central Asia, shares a mountainous border with Afghanistan and has had tense relations with Kabul's Taliban authorities.

According to Tajik security services cited by the state-owned *Khovar* news agency, "four terrorists were neutralised" after they refused to put down arms in the southern Khatlon region.

Tajik authorities have reported at least five deadly incidents on the mountainous border, which is some 1,350 kilometres (840 miles) long, since November.

An *AFP* count using official data found that 16 people have been killed in total. These include Tajik border guards, Chinese workers and what Dushanbe calls "smugglers" and "terrorists".

After attacks on Chinese nationals in November, Tajik authorities urged the Taliban government to take measures to prevent destabilisation of the volatile border region, where drug traffickers and militants are active.

In December, five people were killed in an armed clash on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, according to Tajik state media. It added that the people killed in the clash included "three terrorists" and two Tajik border officers.

Dushanbe is also concerned about the presence in Afghanistan of members of the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Khorasan.—AFP

# Pentagon readies 1,500 troops for potential Minnesota deployment

Army places units on prepare-to-deploy orders in case violence escalates

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon has ordered about 1,500 active-duty soldiers in Alaska to prepare for a possible deployment to Minnesota, the site of large protests against the government's deportation drive, two US officials told *Reuters* on Sunday.

The army placed the units on prepare-to-deploy orders in case violence in the mid-western state escalates, the officials said, though it is not clear whether any of them will be sent.

President Donald Trump threatened on Thursday to use the Insurrection Act to deploy military forces if officials in the state do not stop protesters from targeting immigration officials after a surge in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

But if the troops are deployed, it is unclear whether the Trump administration would invoke the Insurrection Act.

Even without invoking the act, a president can deploy active-duty forces for certain domestic purposes such as protecting federal property, which Trump cited as a justification for sending Marines to Los Angeles last year.

In addition to the active-duty forces, the Pentagon could also attempt to deploy newly created National Guard rapid-response forces for civil disturbances.

The Pentagon and the White House did not immediately respond to requests from *Reuters* for comment on the order, which was first reported by *ABC News*.

**Trump's threat**

"If the corrupt politicians of Minnesota don't obey the law and stop the professional agitators and insurrectionists from attacking the Patriots of ICE, who are only trying to do their job, I will institute the INSURRECTION ACT," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

The soldiers subject to deployment specialise in cold-weather operations and are assigned to two US Army infantry battalions under the 11th Airborne Division, which is based in Alaska, the officials said.—Reuters

PROTESTERS scuffle with an ICE supporter who was in downtown for 'Americans Against Islamification' rally.—AFP

# Govt admits 'thousands of deaths' as Iran begins to restore internet

Official puts death toll around 5,000; judiciary announces executions will go ahead

PARIS: Acknowledging thousands of deaths in the recent protests that swept the country, Iran's supreme leader blamed the United States and Israel for organising the deadly violence.

"At least 5,000 people have been killed, including about 500 security personnel," an Iranian officiail said, as authorities ordered gradual restoration of internet access after a 10-day shutdown aimed at quelling riots.

Demonstrations sparked in late December by anger over economic hardship exploded into protests widely seen as the biggest challenge to the Iranian leadership in years.

Officials said the protests were peaceful until foreign influence turned them violent.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene if protesters continued to be killed on the streets or were executed. In a social media post on Friday, he thanked Tehran's leaders, saying they had called off scheduled mass executions.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, however, made it cler that local or international criminals would be punished. "We will not drag the country into war, but we will not let domestic or international criminals go unpunished," Iran's state media quoted him as saying.

THIS handout photograph provided by the office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei shows him addressing people in Tehran. —AFP

On Sunday, the judiciary indicated that executions may go ahead.

"A series of actions have been identified as Mohareb, which is among the most severe Islamic punishments," Iranian judiciary spokesperson Asghar Jahangir told a presser.

Mohareb, an Islamic legal term meaning to wage war against God, is punishable by death under Iranian law.

In an interview with *Politico* on Saturday, Trump said, "It's time to look for new leadership in Iran".

The Iranian official in the region said the verified death toll was unlikely to get much higher.

"The final toll is not expected to increase sharply," the official said, adding that "Israel and armed groups abroad" had supported and equipped those taking to the streets.

The Iranian government regularly blames unrest on foreign enemies, including the United States and Israel - an arch foe of the Islamic Republic which launched military strikes on Iran in June.

**Highest death toll in Kurdish areas**

The Iranian official, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue, claimed some of the heaviest clashes and highest number of deaths were in the Iranian Kurdish areas in the country's northwest. Kurdish separatists have been active in those areas and flare-ups there have been among the most violent in past periods of unrest.

Some sources said that armed Kurdish separatist groups sought to cross the border into Iran from Iraq in a sign of foreign entities potentially seeking to take advantage of instability in the country.

The Norway-based Iranian Kurdish rights group Hengaw said some of the heaviest clashes during protests that erupted in late December were in Kurdish areas in the northwest.

Meanwhile, Iranian authorities said internet access was being gradually restored.

Some internet access has been restored in Iran, a monitor said on Sunday. "Traffic data indicate a significant return to some online services including Google, suggesting that heavily filtered access has been enabled, corroborating user reports of partial restoration," Netblocks said in a social media post.

The *Tasnim* news agency earlier reported "the relevant authorities announced that internet access would be gradually restored", but gave no further details.

On Sunday morning, some foreign news agencies were able to connect to the internet from its Tehran office, though the vast majority of internet providers and mobile internet remain cut. Outgoing international calls have been possible since Tuesday, and text messaging was restored on Saturday morning.— Agencies

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